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CHAIRMAN'S INTRODUCTORY
REMARKS*

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THE New York Academy of Medicine, through the Committee on Public Health, organized a program planning committee for this meeting on health aspects of nuclear power plant incidents as part of the Academy's ongoing interest in radiation and the public. The program planning committee was comprised of representatives from academia, government, and medicine. The authoritative experts who will speak during this two-day conference also represent those various fields.

The Academy has previously expressed its views on the horrors of nuclear war, and has pointed out the unfeasibility of a redeeming role for medicine in the event of such a war. The health aspects of nuclear reactor incidents are another matter, for reactors are among us and we among them. We must understand their impact on health.

Conflict exists concerning the extent of potential hazards to the public, and we must try to learn whether we have nothing to fear but fear itself,

*Presented as part of the *Symposium on the Health Aspects of Nuclear Power Plant Incidents* held by the Committee on Public Health of the New York Academy of Medicine April 7 and 8, 1983.

or, on the other hand, whether the advocates of atomic energy have created a cult from which we must be deprogrammed. New buzzwords of anxiety assail us: Salem, Three Mile Island, Indian Point, and Shoreham.

The subject of nuclear power provokes conflict, advocates, and critics. We have tried to balance these views in the program but the strongest opponents of nuclear power did not accept our invitation to speak. Many problems will be approached by the speakers, varying from questions concerning the biological effects of low level radiation to the integrity of containment vessels. It is an aim of this conference to develop for the physician a background for critical evaluation of reactor incidents just as he has had to develop a background for evaluation of disease in individuals. Physicians have been trained to become problem solvers, and emphasis has almost restricted their training to treating crises in individuals. They rarely think aggressively of crises to the public health. But now, with the problem of nuclear incidents associated with reactors, the physician is presented with this potential crisis. He needs new insight and authoritative information.

For the regulator or governmental law maker, this conference aims to present the state of the art and science to enable him more wisely to distinguish between hyped media and reasonable hypothesis. For the informed public, the information from this meeting aims to weigh the benefits of nuclear energy against its risks, and the papers should represent a resource for study and decision analysis.

The New York Academy of Medicine is privileged to sponsor this conference with the New York State Health Department. The State of New York has demonstrated its concern for public health by its support of this meeting so that it may apply measured wisdom to its decision making in this atomic arena. It is with pride that the New York Academy of Medicine has joined Dr. David Axelrod, Commissioner of Health for the State of New York, in this endeavor. Along with his lieutenants, Drs. H. Lawrence Vallet and John Matuszek, Dr. Axelrod has provided the Academy with the resources and cooperation which have resulted in this conference.